

## An Old Pilgrim.

In front of a fire-place where fire is never lighted sits a group of women. One is of English parentage but born near Burmah, who has been in Rangoon, in the Andaman islands, in South India and North India. By her, on the sofa, sits another, born in the Buckeye State of the far-away North American continent. Next to her sits a pleasant-faced woman, a native of the Tamil country of South India. In the chair next hers is another of Ohio's daughters, and between their chairs, on the floor, is a Bundel-Kandi woman, who has found a Savior who satisfies her need.

Across India from the place of the birth of the first Anglo-Indian woman, in the great Indian seaport, Bombay, was born the next young English woman.

In front of this group of Christian women, under a mantle-piece with the usual mantle decorations, sits another woman so different from the rest. She is very thin and her complexion is a light brown, her features are not without refinement, her eyes are bright and full of strange lights and shades. On her head, and covering the short iron-gray hair, is an Indian cap with ear laps, over this is wound a figured handkerchief, giving a sort of turban effect. On her body is a single dingy white cloth in which she drapes her entire figure as she sits on the rug.

When her thin arms are waved in her many speaking gestures, one sees they are entirely devoid of the usual glass and metal bangles which Hindu women, rich and poor, wear. But above the elbow is a plain iron band, symbol of her chains, the widow's iron which has as truly entered her soul as bound itself on her arm. On her wrist is a string of wooden beads, and as her cloth falls away, we see many strings of wooden beads and a queer old copper case on a string. On the beads she counts the "vain repetition" of the names of her gods.

In the copper case is the mystic writing given her by her *guru* (master) at some shrine.

The woman from the Tamil country leans forward and her words flow—she is speaking of One she loves, who has saved her from the darkness of death—JESUS. “You have gone over weary roads,” she said; “you have sought in north and south and east and west for a *guru* (master), did you find one pure, one sinless, one strong to save, one to give you the heart’s ease you sought, has your heart rest?”

All the time she was speaking the woman on the rug swayed her head negatively in a sort of rhythmical way to the words, and the Tamil Christian went on. “I once knew a woman like yourself, a Brahmin. She had been to *Gungotri* (where the Ganges rises), up in the land of eternal snows, far from our sunny plains, away up in the “Abode of Snow” (Himalaya), and had completed visiting the four great shrines, situated at the four cardinal points of India, Jagannath, Ramnath, Dwarakanath and Badrinath. On the strength of this fact, she was herself saluted as a god and went freely where she would, a Hindu saint, people bowed down to her and yet she said, ‘*I have no peace.*’ One day she heard of a Savior from sin after so many years of weary seeking, at last of salvation ‘without money and without price.’”

*Without money and without price,*” murmured the strange figure on the hearth-rug, shaking her head in the same fashion as before.

We wondered, as her eyes took on a strange, far-away, almost weird, light, as if her thoughts were hundreds of miles away by Jagannath, where pilgrims are robbed at Kasi (Benares), where the people go away empty-hearted and empty-handed. The christian woman finished the story of the other woman who is now in Bombay helping to give God’s word to her people.

“And you?” some one asks, “Have you been long a pilgrim?”

“Many years,” she said, and almost involuntarily she touches the soles of her feet, poor, tired feet.

"I, too, have been to Jagannath. One priest sat here, another there, and there, and *there*. This one received two annas; that, one rupee, and when all the rupees were gone they gave that and *that*," and she slapped herself on either cheek.

"In Kashi once I bowed with the throng and people walked on my shoulders. I gave money to the priests, and when my all was gone they said, 'Hut! hut!' (Get out! get out!). The *rani* (queen) of Panna wanted me to live there and sing to her and teach her, but the maids, oh! the maids, they tossed their heads" (imitating them all the time perfectly), "and they said, 'Who is this person who has slipped in,' and I could not endure them.

"You have said words to me to-night *like living water*. Salaam, sister, salaam, sister," and she parted with each so. One of them thought of the afternoon when the Brahmini had begun, "Maharaj!" (Great King) and she said, "No, no, say *sister*."

"*Little sister!*" the woman exclaimed, and swift tears filled her eyes. "Sister, sister," she murmured. "Yes, *sister*," and then she said, "My master (husband) died when I was about twenty years old and I had no son, only one daughter. They broke my anklets, bracelets, and jewelry, and beat me in the face," gesturing all the time most expressively. "They took away my pretty clothes and the wife of the elder brother said bitter, bitter words. My little daughter died and there was *no comforter*."

"*I poured out my grief to the fields*, and when I could not bear it all, I went to my childhood home. My mother and father died and then *there was no one in the world to love me*—no love, no love, and then I began to wander, and so my life has passed away."

Her thoughts again seemed far, far away. Was she offering attar and sandal-wood and pouring out water by some hideous idol; did she see through the sham of priest and "holy man"?

How mournful it all is, how pitiable; how can we draw them into the kingdom? "Draw me, draw me with the

cords of love," some way sings itself into the memory of one.

The old pilgrim goes away, but in the morning returns. She goes to the school this time, and sees the girls happy and busy with their lessons. She hears them sing of Jesus. She begins swaying to and fro again, saying, "Light in the darkness! Light in the darkness!" She is able to recognize the light. Oh, that she would receive the Light of the World! As she came upon the verandah she was murmuring in her life-long fashion, perhaps, "Sita Ram! Sita Ram!"

"Oh, not *that* name!" the girls exclaimed, and began, eagerly, to tell her of the One God and Savior. Such a message! "A word in season to him that is weary." How the teacher was thrilled as she saw the bright, young faces turned to this poor old pilgrim, and then they began to suggest hymns, all about *Jesus*, and they sung earnestly. Oh, what a Savior! No wonder she murmured, as she looked at these girls of her own country, "*Light in the darkness! Light in the darkness!*"

She came back several times, and once told us the name the priest gave her as a child was Saguniya, but because of her many pilgrimages, her *guru* gave her the name *Ramabai*. Another widowed *Ramabai*, would she, too, might be such a blessing as she of Sharada Sadan, at Poona! We asked: "When are you going home?"

"I, where have *I* a home? I have placed faith on many idols, have gone from shrine to shrine; now I will place faith on One." She repeated after me, "For God so loved the world—" Will the thought remain with her; will the old repetition crowd it all out? God forbid.

She says she goes to take her nephew to his abode, and then to return and stay. We do not know; she has probably passed on. Pray that she may live to return; that she may leave her idols, poor, tired pilgrim.

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